New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

Volume XII, Number 17 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of September 24, 1951

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Out West of Eighth"

New York Post

September 21, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

The News From B'way Isn't Good

Nothing, I am sorry to say, could be much less funny than Kenyon Nicholson's "Out West of Eighth," a comedy about rodeo cowboys in New York, which opened lugubriously at the Ethel Barrymore Theater last night. Although a valiant effort has been made to whip up hilarity concerning the antics of the virile Westerners camping out in a hotel in the effete vicinity of Madison Square Garden, the fine determination proves dismally unavailing.

Mr. Nicholson, who has had better luck with his racy excursions into farcical realms in the past, builds his narrative about the struggle for the person of a rather easily persuaded manicurist between a stalwart horseman from the open spaces and a somewhat less exuberant ex-bellhop, who works on a dude ranch in Pennsylvania. All sorts of hopefully frantic things take place, including the hiding of the Westerner's horse in a bathroom, but the fun never gets started.

Active Actors

There is always something particularly depressing in the sight of actors darting all over the stage in a grim frenzy of abandon on errands that a playwright hopes will prove madly comic, while the audience sits there with icy calmness. This is what happens with "Out West of Eighth." If the most persistent determination to be funny made for laughter, the report on Mr. Nicholson's abortive comedy wouldn't have to be so glum today.

As it is, there really is nothing pleasant that I can think of to say about "Out West of Eighth," save that it can't really be as lacking in festivity as it seemed in last night's performance. There must be a few amusing lines somewhere in dialogue that has been written for it. But I must admit my inability to find any of them. It seemed characteristic that the loudest laugh of the evening came when someone mentioned Wilmington, Delaware.

The Background

Even though the tale of the battle for the frail manicurist doesn't turn out amusingly, it might have seemed that the background of the bewildered cowboys in the New York hotel would make for some colorful and satirical humor that could have brightened the proceedings considerably. Unfortunately, this doesn't work out, either. I am sure that more interesting things take place around Madison Square Garden during the course of one of the rodeos there than are to be found throughout the course of the new play.

The actors work diligently, if not with outstanding effectiveness. Robert Keith Jr. is properly stalwart and shows signs of humor as the amorous Westerner, and Richard Carlyle is credible enough as the Easterner. Barbara Baxley looks curiously like Dorothy Stickney as the manicurist, and Irene Cowan is certainly an active-type actress as a woman in pursuit of sex. It may not be their fault that they are not very entertaining. The season isn't noticeably advanced by the arrival of "Out West of Eighth."

"OUT WEST OF EIGHTH"

Comedy by Kenyon Nicholson; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Jocelyn; presented by Courtney Burr and Malcolm Pearson at the Barrymore Theatre, September 20, 1951. The cast:

Cecil Wulliver....Gene Darfler
Virgil Lavendar..Dennis Weaver
Delbert Moon...Charles Windell
Joe Varro.....Jim Moreno
Eddie Todd....Richard Carlyle
Horace MacNamara.....
Cliff Dunstan
Everett Garner...Al Henderson
Clovis Garrett.....
Texas Jim Robertson
Lottie Vogel.....Edna Preston
Skeeter Roach..Bill McCutcheon
Dad Offutt.....Earl Jay Gilbert
Lash Castro...Robert Keith, Jr.
Virginia Beamer.....
Barbara Baxley
Booger Lowry.....
Charles Thompson
Gale Rambo.....Margaret Hill
Blaine Rambo....Tommy Allen
Ginger Hornick...Mary Carver
Peaches Gomez.....
Patricia John Canty
Tony Demopolis..Martin Greene
Rita Crummitt....Irene Cowan
Harry Crummitt.....
Donald McClelland
Lyman Stack..Alan Jay Schnapier
Mrs. Otis Stack....Mary Perry
Mr. Ogilbie.....Donald Bain

The New York Times

September 21, 1951

Kenyon Nicholson's 'Out West of Eighth' Chronicles Some Follies of Rodeo Performers in New York

By BROOKS ATKINSON

No one takes credit in the program for the direction of "Out West of Eighth," which opened at the Ethel Barrymore last evening for a limited engagement. Marc Connelly, who began the direction, and Burgess Meredith, who finished it, are not taking credit in public for what they have done; and, as a matter of fact, they shouldn't.

Probably the author and the producers wish that they could be anonymous, too. For "Out West of Eighth" is one of those ordeals in disaster that leave an audience incredulous and add ten years to the age of a first-nighter.

* * *

The author is Kenyon Nicholson, who has a fine record in the theatre. In 1927 he wrote "The Barker," which was one of the most enjoyable sagas of show business that were popping all over Broadway in those days. In 1933 he was co-author of "Sailor, Beware!", one of the gustiest of the harum-scarum larks. "Little Eva" in 1928 was pretty good, and "Torch Song" in 1930 had its points. Mr. Nicholson is also a very good-looking gentleman and comes from a sound state —Indiana.

"Out West of Eighth" is a rumpus about the hotel life of some cowhands who are working in a rodeo at the Garden. There are a great many characters, most of them enormously tall and husky; and they get into a lot of trouble with women and horses.

* * *

This is a good enough idea for a racy and raucous yarn, and now and then you can see the glimmering of a theatrical idea behind the pall of boredom. Sometimes plays of this kind work and then everyone in the audience has an evening of happy guffawing. Sometimes they don't; and it is hard to say why. "Out West of Eighth" is one that doesn't work, and it is awful.

It has been produced by Courtney Burr and Malcolm Pearson, who almost a year ago were hugging themselves over the resounding success of Wolcott Gibbs' "Season in the Sun." Conspiring with the anonymous directors, they have persuaded Ralph Alswang to design several scenes representing a discouraged hotel, and a platoon of stalwart actors to huff and puff around the stage.

Even when they know they are compounding a felony, actors have enough principle to do the best they can with the material. Mr. Nicholson's actors pitch into his play as though they thought they were limning a masterpiece. The most massive of them is Robert Keith Jr. as a belligerent, egotistic, impulsive dude-wrangler who grabs dames wherever he can find them. The prettiest is Barbara Baxley as a confused manicurist; and the most comic is Irene Cowan as a provincial wife in a carnival mood.

* * *

But neither they nor their gaudy associates can make anything intelligible or lively out of the panting script or the hamstrung direction. Dr. Alexander Haas, the eminent musicologist, has provided a band of able instrumentalists in the orchestra pit and a learned score of Western tunes.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

September 21, 1951

By Bert McCord

Hotel Stampede

"Out West of Eighth" took a long time to get started last night at the Baryrmore Theater. By the middle of the second act, the actors were racing madly up and down the corridors of the hotel setting and a horse was neighing in the bathroom, but it was apparent that the play was going exactly nowhere. The actual running time could not have been more than an hour and forty minutes. This was about an hour and a half too long.

The idea of setting a play in a Manhatan hotel frequented by the cowboys who come to town each year for the rodeo at the Garden is fair enough. There are also possibilities in the juxtaposition of drawling wide-eyed westerners and sharp city slickers. Kenyon Nicholson forgot just one thing—to write a play. With nothing to hang onto, the actors struggle through the proceedings, clutching occasional lines of comfortable dialogue and straining to keep the rest from being embarrassing.

* * *

Mr. Nicholson has hinged his plot onto the old familiar triangle of two men and a girl. In this case, it is, of course, a cowboy and a bell hop and never the twain shall meet. The girl is the manicurist in the hotel. Perhaps the most obvious reason why this usually serviceable formula didn't work is the fact that the script compels the cowboy to play for farce, the bellhop for high comedy and loses the girl somewhere in the middle. The result was that nobody cared who got the girl.

It shold not be surprising then that the actors were able to contribute only a series of stock performances. Robert Keith jr. makes perhaps the strongest impression with his impersonation of a jut-jawed Westerner who likes his steaks scorched and the blood left in and gets riled up something awful when somebody tries to rustle his dudes. Barbara Baxley is attractive but bewildered in the part of the dim-witted manicurist, who has an infatuation for the cowboy and love for the bellhop. In the role of the latter, Richard Carlyle seeks valiantly to give a legimate performance only to find that his character has no motivation at all.

* * *

The progress of the play was not helped a bit by the many interruptions for scenery changes, although considering the nature of the changes, they were undoubtedly effected with unusual dispatch. The script and even the actors would have been helped considerably by a theater-wise director. As it is, if you have a yen to catch a glimpse of chaps, ropes, saddles, boots and spurs, you had better buy a ticket for the rodeo opening Wednesday at Madison Square Garden.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

September 21, 1951

'Out West of Eighth' Opens at Barrymore

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There is just a chance that "Out West of Eighth" is a better comedy than it seemed from the disjointed performance it had at its premiere last night.

The play opened with no out of town try-out, and a recent change of directors. Neither fact helped. Marc Connelly and Burgess Meredith, neither billed, seemed to have negated each other's work at guiding the play. The performance was an orphaned one, as the cast seemed sadly in need of a mother to guide it.

The play is based on a typical, but tried and true farce formula. It takes place in a hotel near Madison Square Garden and tells of goings on there during a rodeo.

Word of Advice.

A manicurist is engaged to an ex-pug who is dude ranching in Western Pennsylvania. She is swept off her feet by the wolf of the cowboy troupe, and after a couple of arguments with her true love, finds herself trying to marry the Westener.

After a Marx Brothers chase through a hotel corridor and an attempt to hide a horse in the bathroom, the situation is saved.

An addict of dude ranches, in the person of a wealthy wife with a roving eye, explains to the handsome cowboy that he will lose value to fans like her, if he marries.

This is told in innumerable scenes, that occasionally overlap in time. It is clumsily enacted, with no suggestion of comic pace or witty pay off.

Worth Noting.

The biggest waste of the evening is the ladies' performances, both by relative unknowns, and both of a quality worth noting.

Barbara Baxley is the manicurist. It is a fresh and charming job. She plays with the intensity and exaggeration that are so necessary to make a farce effective. In fact she deserves medals for behaving throughout as if she had no idea she was not in the funniest play ever done. Such loyalty and concentration are admirable.

As the menace to cowboys, Irene Cowan gets a big majority of the evening's laughs. Her style suggests that she is adept at impersonations, in fact she sometimes suggests Shiela Barrett imitating Ethel Barrymore. She has a consistent comic inspiration, and does her best to make up laughs when they are scarce.

DAILY NEWS

September 21, 1951

'Out West of Eighth' Disjointed

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Kenyon Nicholson might have had a pretty funny little play in "Out West of Eighth" if, in the writing of it, he had tried to keep it together. But as the farce stands at the Barrymore Theatre, where it opened last evening, it is in so many little bits and pieces that it can't pull itself together and keep moving.

George Abbott, a comedy man from way back, told me years ago that the secret of a farce is never to give the audience time to think. If you give an audience half a moment with nothing to do but ponder, it will catch up with you and will realize that the play is a lot of nonsense. But if you manage to keep a jump ahead of the customers all the time you have a hit on your hands.

Too Many Scenes.

"Out West of Eighth" is an amiable affair about life in a crummy hotel near Madison Square Garden during the annual Fall engagement of the Rodeo. A dude wrangler from the open spaces steals a cute little manicurist from an ex-bellhop, and there is a great amount of furious but footless commotion in the rooms and corridors of the hotel. The play would have been much better in one room and one corridor, for last evening some of the stage waits between scenes were longer than the scenes themselves. The actors would just get going on something funny when the curtain was coming down and by the time the curtain went up again I had forgotten what was funny and had also forgotten the plot.

Some Engaging Players.

Some of the actors are engaging. Barbara Baxley, playing the manicurist, is something like Dorothy Stickney and something like Joyce Arling—a good girl for comedy because she paces her performance well. Robert Keith Jr. does very well as the big he-man from way out West, and Richard Carlyle plays straight, as he should, in the role of the bellhop who doesn't like having his girl taken from him. There also is an amusing performance by a newcomer to Broadway, Irene Cowan, who impersonates a lady of wealth who likes to be wrangled by cowhands.

There is some funny stuff in "Out West of Eighth," but it does not come together as a play. And it's too late now for Mr. Nicholson to rewrite it.

Journal American
September 21, 1951

Isn't Much of a Play But Irene Is Fine

By ROBERT GARLAND

The new theatrical season opened again last night. This time it was at the Ethel Barrymore. The play, "Out West of Eighth," was all in English. But it didn't seem to matter. It might as well have had a Sanskrit act or two as far as I'm concerned. Understanding the words didn't mean a thing.

The author was Kenyon Nicholson, who once wrote "Sailor Beware" with the help of Charles Robinson. The director was Marc Connelly, who gave way to Burgess Meredith. Neither's name appeared on the printed program. A name that did appear was that of the costume maker. And only half of her's.

There's a play in these Madison Square Garden cowboys who fall off their horses for everyone to see. A funny on-the-surface and serious-underneath concoction. But "Out West of Eighth" isn't it. As a matter of fact, Mr. Nicholson's latest endeavor isn't much of anything. Or for very long.

If this "new comedy" — I quote, you notice — is remembered, it'll be remembered for introducing Irene Cowan to Broadway. You'll hear from Miss Cowan later on.

* * *

Much Ado About...

The story of "Out West of Eighth" is difficult to follow. It sort of wanders. It sort of wanders when it doesn't stand still. But it deals with the life and loves of a Madison Square Garden cowboy who never saw a cow, who never rode a pony and who never had a girl who couldn't make up her mind.

The girl likes too many men. She works, if you'll pardon the expression, in a secondary West Side hotel manicuring finger nails. She dearly loves Madison Square Garden cowboys in general and Lash Castro in particular. Lash is stopping in the Rialto Plaza, where "Out West of Eighth" takes place.

Things try to begin to happen. People start to run around. Some run as far as Elkton, Md., where, as a reporter for a Baltimore newspaper, I was once escorted out of town. Some stay where they are and run around in circles. Some stay where they are and run. But the excitement soon is over.

The end is happy because it is the end. Boy gets girl, I forget what happens to the other fellow and you're out in the open air wondering what has happened.

* * *

She'll Be Back

As has been said, you'll be hearing more of Irene Cowan. She plays Rita Crummitt. But only for a little while. Take my word for it, she'll be back in a better play before long. A cross between Charlotte Greenwood and somebody I can't remember, she has a fine future on her own.

Robert Keith Jr., whom I once saw in Chicago in the lead of "Mister Roberts," is a fine figure of a guy as Lash Castro. But that's about all. As Lash Castro's rival, Richard Carlyle, is Eddie Todd. Once, when Marlon Brando met with an injury, he was seen in "A Streetcar Named Desire." Where I don't know.

There're other fellows in this Eastern-Western, for the cast is plenty large. And other girls. But none has a chance to show off. I doubt if many could. The scenery by Ralph Alswang is movable, plentiful and changeable. The direction is ignored. A Mark Smith helped with the playmaking . . .

It was foolish, I think, for "Out West of Eighth" to open only to close again. Nevertheless, I still believe in the future of Madison Square Gardeners And Irene Cowan.

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Daily Mirror

September 21, 1951

'Out West of 8th' Should Be Fun, But Isn't

By ROBERT COLEMAN

There's one thing to be said for Kenyon Nicholson. Even when he writes a bad play, he manages to find a colorful background for it. For "Out West of Eighth," which Courtney Burr and Malcolm Pearson brought to the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last evening, he has chosen a rowdy dump of a hotel jammed with rodeo performers.

Burr and Pearson, who probably wish they were back on the sands of Fire Island with "Season in the Sun," must have thought they had a rollicking farce like "Room Service" or "Sailor, Beware" when they read the script. It starts out to be a zany charade about cowhands on the loose in New York, and all too soon turns out to be a rootin', tootin' bore.

The plot, which sprawls over atmospheric Ralph Alswang sets, has to do with the battle between a hotel bellboy turned dude-rancher in the Poconos and the genuine article from the wide open spaces of the West over the affections of the hotel manicurist. The comedy is highlighted by the hiding of a horse in a bathroom, the psychopathic pranks of a screwball flirt from Wilmington, and a hectic Keystone chase through the hostelry's rooms and corridors.

It should be good fun, but it isn't. The characters manage to become incredible. The situations are almost as amateurish as those in a highschool lark. The gags fall flat on their faces. And the local color becomes hopelessly blurred. In all justice to Nicholson, it should be reported that he was the victim of a necessary last minute switch in directors. In fact, the staging is not credited to anyone on the program.

Richard Carlyle, Robert Keith, Jr., Barbara Baxley and Irene Cowan labor diligently in the lead roles. Miss Cowan attempts to combine the best features of Charlotte Greenwood, Carol Channing and Zazu Pitts, but the blend is anything but smooth. The entire cast merits a salute for valor under fire. There are a lot of good players in it, but they take a beating from their material.

In the lounge of the Ethel Barrymore Theatre is a bronze head of the distinguished actress for whom the house was named. We might be mistaken, but during intermission we thought we saw her fine eyebrows lift in amazement at what had been transpiring upstairs. "Out West of Eighth" just goes to show that even a group of gifted people, with outstanding past records, can come a cropper when Lady Luck is looking the other way.

The new arrival is a relatively short play, but it seems to go on forever. We came away with the impression that we had spent at least a dismal weekend in the Barrymore. And it was really only something under two hours.

"Borscht Capades"

New York Post

September 18, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

'Borscht Capades' Arrives in Town

It can certainly be said that these bilingual revues are improving. At least, "Borscht Capades," which describes itself as "English-Yiddish," opened at the Royale Theater last night, and, while it is considerably less than a masterpiece of show-making, it is so superior to "Bagels and Yox," which was billed as "American-Yiddish" and had its premiere the previous week, that there is almost the temptation to call it one. I think, however, that I can resist the temptation and say merely that "Borscht Capades" has its entertaining numbers.

When "Bagels and Yox," which was originally scheduled to come into town after "Borscht Capades," suddenly shifted its opening date and arrived before the rival show, there were a few people who felt that a characteristic but dubious Broadway trick was being played on the revue that got here last night. After seeing the two of them, though, my guess would be that what occurred proved to be the best thing that could conceivably have happened to it. As the only local show of its kind, it wouldn't have seemed nearly as good as the contrast made it appear.

No Microphones

I repeat that, at least to those of us who can follow it only in its English, it is no masterpiece. Indeed, it is little more than a passable and rather primitive vaudeville show. But, if it is no triumph of imaginative production, at least it doesn't look as if it had been merely thrown on the stage. There are, in fact, a couple of signs that someone was present in the capacity of director. There are even indications of organization. And finally, as proof that criticism actually can be constructive, advice has been heeded and microphones done away with.

There are several pleasant performers. The Barry Sisters, for example, are a skillful and likeable team of harmonizers, and one of them is a very lovely girl, which is by no means a harm in such an act. Then there is Phil Foster, who chats amiably with his audience and has a fresh sense of humor, even if he does overlook the grim fact that when a monologue goes on too long the law of diminishing returns inexorably sets in. Dave Barry is another comedian with a humorous sense, and there is the singing of Raasche and Jack Hilliard.

Folk Material

It is in the singing of Raasche and some of the dancing that "Borscht Capades" escapes from its Broadway pattern and goes into the valuable field of Jewish folk art. In its efforts to use the warm, rich and moving material of this ancient and dramatic art, the show is modest and almost tentative, which strikes me as a pity, for this is what might have made it an important contribution to current entertainment. But "Borscht Capades" is not after anything so ambitious. On the whole, it is satisfied to be pretty conventional in its aims.

With "Borscht Capades," the series of "English-Yiddish," or, if you prefer, "American-Yiddish" revues apparently comes to an end. I can't say that we critics have been especially helpful in assessing them for our vast and palpitating public. These are shows essentially meant for an audience that doesn't depend much on the verdict of drama reviewers, and it may have been a mistake to invite us to them. All I can say is that the second is much the better of the two shows, which is not the greatest compliment that has ever come from my typewriter.

"BORSCHT CAPADES"

English-Yiddish revue; staged by Mickey Katz; scenery by Charles Elson; choreography by Ted Adair and Belle Didjah; presented by Hal Zeiger at the Royale Theatre, September 17, 1951, with a cast including Mickey Katz, Raasche, Phil Foster, Dave Barry, Patsy Abbott, the Barry Sisters, Jack Hilliard, Alan Shackner, and the Ted Adair Dancers.

Journal American
September 18, 1951

Would've Been Better If It Wasn't So Long

By ROBERT GARLAND

Writing of Yiddish-American revues, "Borscht Capades" is a whole lot more enjoyable than the one that came before. Nobody librettoed this one, either. It features Mickey Katz, a master-of-ceremonies, as well as Phil Foster, who grew in Brooklyn. Joseph Rumshinsky composed some "special music."

Opening last night at the Royale Theatre, there were several things to recommend it. It wasn't too loud because there wasn't any microphone. It wasn't much too long. It was more than a little bright. It might have been brighter if the members of the cast had known when and where to stop.

On the other hand, a Yiddish-American—or English-Yiddish, as this one is called—revue needs a working knowledge of Yiddish. This I haven't got. So I lost out half of the time. More than half of the time, really. Especially when long jokes were going on. A sudden change of language and—

I beg your pardon, but I am a one-languaged American. Because I am, I don't even understand Noel Coward.

* * *

Stayed Too Long

There were rival programs in 45th st. last evening. I hope I'm following the correct one. If I am, the "Borscht Capades" opened with a "Yiddish Square Dance." This was followed by a "Yiddish Mule Train." They looked and sounded neighborly. Then the dancers lighted the Sabbath candles.

Patsy Abbott, who can sing an act and act a song, went "From Sunset Boulevard to Lindy's." And, from the time it took her, back again. This was relieved by "Geshray of de Vilde Katchke" which, even with Mickey Katz and the band, didn't mean a thing. Then Alan Shackner. And the Barry Sisters in "Yiddish Swing."

Phil Foster came on. He's the one that grows in Brooklyn. He's proud of it and should be. But not for so long. Then, to bring the first act to a close, came four chants-and-dances composed by Joseph Rumshinsky, chanted by Jack Hilliard and the Barry Sisters, and danced by the Ted Adair Dancers...

Intermission! Out on the sidewalk, some customers were asking "Why so much Yiddish on New York's Broadway?" Why?

* * *

Not My Show

There was an innovation in the beginning of the second act. Patsy Abbott returned and, before the curtain rose, retold the entire first act in song. Thanks to Miss Abbott, if you miss "Borscht Capades" from the "Yiddish Square Dance" to the "Dance Chassidic," you'll hear all about them, anyway.

The singing lady who calls herself Raasche gave out with "Songs My Mother Taught Me." The songs her mother taught her were many and some of them were soft and folksy. But at long last they gave in to the Mazel Tov Dancers. They danced and danced. And danced. Jack Hilliard relieved them.

Dave Barry relieved Jack Hilliard. I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Hilliard were very, very funny as a professor of "Fractured Yiddish." But not knowing unfractured Yiddish, how could I tell? Mr. Barry, like the rest, was a pleasant enough fellow and spoke New Yorkese better than I. So why didn't he use it?...

"Borscht Capades" is a whole lot more enjoyable than the one that came before. Nevertheless, it's not my show!

DAILY NEWS
September 18, 1951

'Borscht Capades' a Funny Little Revue in Either English or Yiddish

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I had a pleasant, chuckling time last evening at "Borscht Capades," an English-Yiddish revue presented by Hal Zeiger at the Royale Theatre. Yet the only Yiddish word I know, maybe, is pipik.

I must have learned pipik from Willie Howard or Sophie Tucker at the Palace Theatre when you were a little toddler. It always made the wise audiences howl and scream with laughter. I remember that, later, the Minskys were running burlesque at the Republic Theatre, and each week their press agent, Mike Goldreyer, had to think up a new show title for the big electric sign out front. Same show but new name every week. Mike's chef d'oeuvre was, of course, the title he picked for the week Earl Carroll's "Murder at the Vanities" opened across the street at the New Amsterdam. It was "Slaughter at Minsky's." But his next-best title was, for a reason I still cannot fathom, "Tillie Pipik from Peru."

Well, last week at that other and quite gruesome English-Yiddish revue, "Bagels and Yox," some comedian said the magic word and those in the know just yelled. Last night at "Borscht Capades" somebody said it again and aroused laughter. Since this is about the only Yiddish word I know, I can't say authoritatively how humorous the entire language may be, but pipik doesn't strike me as anything much. All it means is belly button. That's all—belly button, or navel. I don't get it.

Three Good Monologists.

But I did get a lot of, and out of, "Borscht Capades," thanks to the work of four solo entertainers. Three of them—Phil Foster, Dave Barry and Patsy Abbott—talk, and the fourth, named simply Raasche, sings Yiddish songs with fine simplicity and warmth.

Until Phil Foster appeared before the curtain last night, looked out at all of us and inquired, "Well, what do you want to do now." I thought that the monologist had just about disappeared from show business. Mr. Foster is a monologist. He talks for 20 minutes or more, telling about his boyhood in Brooklyn and throwing away jokes very neatly, and he is a clever and funny fellow. Mr. Barry, whose act is titled "Fractured Yiddish," is a very adroit man with an anecdote. And they both operate quietly and naturally, which is a relief from most of the comedy we are getting these days.

Attractive Singers, Too.

Miss Abbott is a gabby dame—a sort of Lulu McConnell with muscles, for she can wiggle as fast as she can talk. She and her companions have managed a show which is unpretentiously but nicely staged—and a show which is, I am sure, at least as funny in English as it is in Yiddish. Two other attractive members of the company are the Barry sisters, who sing rhythm stuff in both languages and do particularly well with a song titled "I'm So in Love."

The master of ceremonies is a short man, Mickey Katz, who is better as a clarinetist than he is as a comedian But Mr. Katz is the man who directed the show and for this he has earned his wages. The small band which he occasionally conducts is excellent. So even if you don't know one word of Yiddish, you should have a rather nice time at "Borscht Capades," and you should have an even better time if you know both languages. The only customer this show would throw for a loss would be one who knows only Yiddish.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

September 18, 1951

By Bert McCord

Needs Sour Cream

"Borscht Capades" came to the Royale Theater last night after what has been hailed by the management as a triumphant tour from the West Coast. It also opened, according to the management, to a tremendous advance sale. It will need that and more to make the grade on Broadway, for it is nothing more or less than a fair night club show, boasting a number of rather attractive performers, but lacking in both originality and distinction.

As indicated by the title, the show is aimed primarily at theatergoers who understand Yiddish. (Borscht is beet soup.) A good deal of English is spoken throughout the evening, particularly in the second act, but most of the laughs from what might be described as an appreciative audience came during the first act when the performers were talking like Hildegarde's theme song, jumping back and forth from Yiddish into English.

The highlight of the evening was the singing of a handsome, black-haired, black-eyed girl who calls herself Raasche. She was appropriately impressive in a number entitled "Lighting of the Sabbath Candles" and was simple and effective in a series of "Songs my mother taught me." Also of professional caliber were the two comedians, Phil Foster and Dave Barry, but their material wasn't exactly scintillating. A Jewish Milton Berle, Foster works with a rapid-fire delivery and lots of throw-away lines. He has an engaging smile, especially when feigning embarrassment. Barry is a little comic reminiscent, in appearance at least, of Stan Lupino. He knows how to tell a joke, but unhappily doesn't know any new ones to tell and for a finish has to fall back onto a somewhat tasteless drawing-room bit about his Bar Mitzvah.

Mickey Katz is billed as the star and works in front of his band, which is evidently known for its recordings of, "Yiddish Mule Train" and "Cry of the Wild Goose," both of which are played in the show. He looks like the unhappy victim of all the dialect jokes you ever heard, but doesn't manage to communicate any of the humor. The Barry Sisters are an attractive couple who sing pleasingly, if not memorably. Patsy Abbott is loud and brash and in very questionable taste.

"Borscht Capades," in short, is one of those offerings of which the sponsors say that it is not for the critics, but will convulse the paying public and make a fortune. It played to a receptive first night audience, but seems to have a very limited appeal indeed.

The New York Times

September 18, 1951

'Borscht Capades' Is the Second American-Yiddish Musical Revue Opening on Broadway in a Week

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Week by week the American-Yiddish revues get better. "Borscht Capades," which opened at the Royale last evening is not a floor show, but theatre. It has scenery, costumes and lighting. Most of the actors move. Among them are Phil Foster and Dave Barry, patter comedians, and a beautiful brunette lady, named Raasche, who sings Jewish folk songs in an attractive, ladylike manner.

Homeless people who frequent poorly lighted dives late at night may have caught Mr. Foster's act and perhaps were sober enough to remember it. But to one who has never heard him before Mr. Foster's droll, relaxed legend of family habits and neighborhood grifters is altogether hilarious and a solid piece of humorous Americana. "Borscht Capades" begins to have some character when he strolls, snarling and sneering, to the center of the stage.

* * *

Miss Raasche has a small voice. But her taste in vocal music is impeccable, and the songs her mother taught her have character. Next to closing, Dave Barry, the professor of "fractured Yiddish," comes on with a grave look and tells several very funny stories. To people whose Yiddish is getting rusty some of them are completely unintelligible, which is never much fun in the theatre, no matter what the optimistic producer thinks. But, like all the performers, Mr. Barry's English is as good as the next man's and perhaps better; and once he combs the Yiddish out of his hair, he is entertaining.

In the opinion of one pleasure-mad playgoer, those are the genuinely enjoyable interludes in "Borscht Capades." In all candor, what can be said about the rest? Like all Yiddish shows, this one has a pleasant family flavor. But, excepting the three people already mentioned, the performers are not distinguished and their material is commonplace.

Mickey Katz, leader of the band, is on the silly side as a mountebank. The Barry Sisters, introduced as the Yiddish Andrew Sisters, have considerable well-developed luster as people, but agony singing with bucking and swaying in restless unison is pretty dismal in any language. The Ted Adair dancers do not seem to have any original ideas.

* * *

Our own Joseph Rumshinsky, the Dvorak of Second Avenue, has contributed several of his pastiches of classical music, played incidentally by a good band that includes strings and clarinets as well as the usual bedlam. Perhaps Yiddish-speaking people will find "Borscht Capades" as hospitable and festive as Old Home Week. But in this department's opinion, Mr. Foster, Mr. Barry and Miss Raasche represent the only first-rate talent in it. As theatre performers, they have something interesting to say.

Daily Mirror

September 18, 1951

'Borscht Capades' Rich In Melody Hilarity

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Broadway is breaking out in a rash of English-Yiddish musical revues this season. Latest to arrive is "Borscht Capades" which, incidentally, launched the vogue about three seasons ago in Hollywood. It reached the Royale Theatre last evening under the sponsorship of Hal Zeiger and Mickey Katz.

Zeiger and Katz estimate that Yiddish is used in about 60 percent of the lyrics and about 30 percent of the dialogue. They describe "Borscht Capades" as an "American entertainment, aimed at American-Jewish theatregoers in New York who don't like to stray away from Broadway." It is a special type of show with a special appeal.

However, we think a lot of those unfamiliar with Yiddish may have a good time at the Royale, for "Borscht Capades" is presented with taste and first-rate showmanship. It boasts a cast of ingratiating, gifted and popular performers. Impresario Katz doubles in brass as orchestra leader-comedy singer. He has a pleasing personality, and his Yiddish recordings have sold millions of copies.

Comedian Phil Foster amply justified the enthusiastic notices we have carried here about him from time to time. Phil, of the deadpan, cynical manner, proved dynamite at the premiere. He had the first-nighters roaring. Were we a producer, there would certainly be a spot in our show for him. He's tops among the current crop of laugh provokers.

Dave Barry also proved a show-stopper as "The Professor of Fractured Yiddish." His explanations of stories and characterizations, in an amusing patois, drew robust palm pats. Patsy Abbott, who has enough energy to spark a perpetual motion machine, provided bounce and drive.

The Barry Sisters, an outstanding harmony team; Jack Hilliard, who has a powerful, resonant who has a powerful, resonant voice, and Raasche, with an effectively restrained song style, are others who delighted the customers. The Barry Sisters have gained a large and loyal following via radio and recordings.

Ted Adair's Dancers contributed interesting routines that range from modern to folk. The settings and lighting by Charles Elson and special music by Joseph Rumshinsky are other assets. Oh, yes, the sound equipment was calculated not to send ticket-holders with sensitive eardrums to a specialist—for which, hooray!

"Borscht Capades" is packed with melody and hilarity. It had the initial audience blistering its palms in appreciation. If it's an English-Yiddish revue you're seeking, it should be your dish.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

September 18, 1951

'Borscht Capades' A Big Floor Show

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Borscht Capades," which opened at the Royale Theater last night, is the second invasion of the Broadway legitimate territory by a peculiarly night-club form of entertainment, begun by "Bagels and Yox" last week.

Billed as an English-Yiddish musical revue, the affair is a floor show put on a stage. As far as talent is concerned, it is neither much better nor worse than its predecessor. The big difference is that in "Borscht Capades" nobody seems to be having an awfully good time.

When a crowd of entertainers is offering more good will than genius, it is vastly helped by animation and enthusiasm. This new entertainment, despite occasional very pleasant moments, seems pretty lackadaisical. Last night the performers gave the impression that after the grudging reception some reporters gave "Bagels and Yox," this crowd rather wished it had never planned to conquer Manhattan.

Esoteric Humor.

Top billing on the show goes to Mickey Katz, a band leader responsible for a number of Yiddish recordings of popular songs. He is amiable, and his humor is strictly restricted to those of his audience who know the vernacular.

Phil Foster is a comic who works alone in front of a curtain. He won the audience with good humored jokes about his mother and his own boyhood. In an accent which he described as being half unintelligible Yiddish, and definitely Brooklyn, he speaks with an intonation which duplicates Marlon Brando's in "Streetcar."

Dave Barry has an even more complicated linguistic twist to offer, as he rambles on in jive slang with his key words translated into Yiddish. He also offers a sketch about Lincoln and Grant with the same twists and some remarkable results.

'Come On-a My House

The Barry Sisters, a handsome pair, who sing in close harmony, have the first lively moment in the show when they break up the house with a version of "Come On-a My House" which offers gefultefish or bagels and lox as bait.

A girl with attractive appearance and a pleasant voice, is billed as Raasche, and offers several numbers of neo-traditional content. Patsy Abbott is as hard working and good natured a comedienne as you can find anywhere. Like most of the other entertainers, she is unable to discriminate between the best and worst of her material.

"Bagels and Yox"

Journal American

September 13, 1951

Too Loud, Too Long And Not Very Bright

By ROBERT GARLAND

They pushed the talking-pictures out and pushed a stage-show in at the Holiday Theatre, which used to be the Central before it was the Gotham. The talking-pictures, when I saw their names last Sunday, were "The Sands of Iwo Jima" and "I've Always Loved You."

The stage-show, as of last night, was "Bagels and Yox." It hadn't any author. But, according to the program, it was "the American-Yiddish revue" with songs by Sholom Secunda and Hy Jacobson, lighting by Bruno Maine and a 10-piece orchestra by Irv Carroll.

At the piano, which, like the orchestra, was up on the stage, was Curt Bell. The cast, which was featured, was made up of the Barton Brothers, Lou Saxon, Marty Drake, Larry Albert, Rickie Layne and Velvel, Mary Forrest, Patrice Helene and Jan Howard.

And the bagels which were distributed as an overture to the orchestra were by the Bordon Company. Although promised, there was no cream cheese!

* * *

Awful Earnest

After the company had made "Bagels and Yox" plain to the understanding audience, assisted by the orchestra, the piano and a microphone, Rickie Layne and Velvel came on. Their act was "Such A Good Looking Boy" and I forget what it was all about. Except that it was about long enough.

This was superseded by Johnny Conrad, a morose looking dancer, and Dian Lund, Audrey Barfoot and Tibby Rayburn, morose looking dancers. They danced. There was no given title to their goings-on. You could call it anything you wanted to. Frankly, it was awful, awful earnest.

Then came Mary Forrest, who had "a song in every language." She all but had, too, including the Sanskrit. But her favorite was Yiddish and she used it most frequently. Unfortunately, I couldn't understand her. Maybe I'd have liked her better if I could. Other people seemed to.

I understood the Barton Brothers who followed. Their act was "Yox, Yox and Yox." Among other things, it was a sort of marathon.

* * *

Too Loud, Too Long

A number of customers didn't return after the intermission. I did, but someone was in my seat. So I took another and listened to "Chi-Ri-Bim" by the entire cast. This, in turn, was followed by Lou Saxon. He was a lingerer. A lingerer who outstayed his worked up welcome.

That left "Inimitably Yours," which belonged to Patrice Helene and Jan Howard; "Culture From Carnegie Hall," which belonged to Marty Drake; Larry Alpert, who belonged to "Who Needs It?" and "Let's Dance a Frailichs," which was too tardy for me to wait and see.

The finale—"Bagels and Yox," sung again by the entire company—brought the evening to an end. And, I gathered, none too soon. For "the American-Yiddish revue" wasn't exactly fun. For Miami and Atlantic City, maybe. For Broadway, no. Not even without a microphone.

"Bagels and Yox" was too loud, too long, too trite and far too over-master-of-ceremoney-ed. It also wasn't very bright.

"BAGELS AND YOX"

American-Yiddish revue with songs by Sholom Secunda and Hy Jacobson; lighting by Bruno Maine; orchestra conducted by Irv Carroll; presented by Al Beckman and John Pransky in association with the Brandt Theatres at the Holiday Theatre, September 12, 1951, with a cast including the following: the Barton Brothers, Lou Saxon, Marty Drake, Larry Alpert, Rickie Layne, Marty Forrest, Patrice Helene and Jan Howard.

The New York Times

September 13, 1951

'Bagels and Yox'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

When the footlights go up on 'Bagels and Yox," which opened at the Holiday last evening, they reveal a portable microphone. That sets not only the stage but the tone of the entire performance. For "Bagels and Yox" is a floor show that has worked its way north from Miami and Atlantic City but has not become theatre yet.

According to the office philologists, "Bagels and Yox" is a pun on "bagels and lox," which are favorite Sunday breakfast foods in Jewish homes. "Bagels" are hard doughnuts and "lox" is smoked salmon. As for "yox," they are belly-laughs in any of the common American languages—as in "yocks" or "yaks," according to taste. Possibly this will help to clear up the mystery of the title of the American-Yiddish revue that has now set up shop on Broadway.

Under the direction of Lou Saxon, who is an amiable master of ceremonies, "Bagels and Yox" consists of song numbers, dance numbers and comedy turns, most of them huddled around the microphone. Almost all of it is in English, although the "yox" are generally concealed in Yiddish phrases. It may be that all the Yiddish jibes are devastatingly funny, but this department cannot vouch for that, and even suspects that in "Bagels and Yox" all Yiddish words are regarded as funny, whatever they mean.

"Bagels and Yox" maintains an even level of noisy mediocrity. With one or two exceptions, the material is commonplace. The exceptions are two or three bits of Jewish religious and folk music. What they are doing in this resort floor-show is hard to say. For this ancient music is beautiful. It is overflowing with humanity. Someone could make a memorable musical show out of these songs by taking them seriously and not throwing them away in a tasteless revue desperately coagulated around a microphone.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

September 13, 1951

'Bagels and Yox' Warming, Fun

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Bagels and Yox" is billed as "The American-Yiddish Revue," and you can take for granted its close relation to a night club floor show. Neither title nor description really conveys its good-hearted warmth or joviality.

If the Broadway theater too often seems formal and challenging, here is one case where the atmosphere is as relaxed as it is in a steam bath. There is contagious eagerness about the performers, and casual enthusiasm from the onlookers, that adds up to a real bi-lingual picnic.

It seems to be the chief virtues of the revue stem from its Yiddish nature, as it grows emotional or comic in an uninhibited way. Its faults are those of the night club, overwhelming generosity of the performers, and overpowering volume of sound that keeps filling the Holiday Theater.

Informal Good Cheer.

There is no scenery, and the orchestra is lined across the back of the stage. Occasional solo acts are performed in front of a curtain, but most of the show proceeds in front of the instrumentalists with informal good cheer.

Generally speaking, the show is as much fun with no working knowledge of Yiddish, as it would be if done entirely in English. Where this barrier rears up, though, is in Larry Alpert's comedy act, which winds up the program.

The vast majority of last night's audience caught his every gag with hilarious delight. Those out of the know could only wish his timing and humor permitted more frequent translation, because his presentation is so authoritative and his grimaces so revealing.

Saxon the High Point.

To me the real high point of the evening was Lou Saxon's turn, when he stopped being MC for a few minutes, and told stories. In a day when gags are often too popular, Mr. Saxon's material is classical folk humor. It is always rich with comment on very human behavior, and all its best laughs are close to a tear.

"Bagels and Yox" is a real variety show, with a major act of the evening, the trio called the Barton Brothers, familiar from recordings. This is a wise act, at its best in a number called "Troubles" and weakest when indulging in those nitery-wearied imitations.

Rickie Layne is an absolutely topnotch ventriloquist whose dummy sports a rich Yiddish accent and lilt in his speech. Helene and Howard offer their familiar comic ballroom stuff with great success, lending a unique note to the show.

It is hard to fairly judge the two chief vocalists, Mary Forrest and Marty Drake. Each has a strong manner, and some good material. Both seem to me less successful with their serious stuff.

Variety has always used a phrase, "to beg off," meaning to quit while the audience still clamors, and it would help most of the acts in "Bagels and Yox." But despite this unrestrained quantity, it is an ingratiating, heart-warming evening.

DAILY NEWS

September 13, 1951

'Bagels and Yox' a Friendly but Semi-Pro Night Club Floor Show

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Bagels and Yox," which is described in its own program as "the American-Yiddish revue," had its premiere last evening at the Holiday Theatre. It is an amiable and hard-working night club floor show, but, even though Holiday Theatre is on Broadway, I do not think it is big enough or good enough to be a Broadway musical. But then, maybe "Bagels and Yox" doesn't think so, either. It's a modest set of song, dance and joke acts, modestly presented. It aims for the family trade and not at the sophisticates.

There is a master of ceremonies, Lou Saxon. On the stage is a band with two pianos and several saxes and clarinets. Various numbers appear on schedule. One of the early numbers is performed by Rickie Layne, a ventriloquist, and his dummy, Velvel—a very nice double-voice number combining the best efforts of Edgar Bergen and Paul Winchell and their hard-headed, tough-talking dummies.

Many Imitations.

Then there is a blonde lady named Mary Forrest, who sings Yiddish chants or big loud songs like the works of Ethel Merman and Sophie Tucker. Miss Forrest's imitation of Miss Merman and Miss Tucker is pretty good. Her impersonation of Hildegarde was lost upon me because I have never laid eyes or ears on Hildegarde but have been fed up to my elbows on imitations of her.

Next come the Barton brothers, three energetic gentlemen who not only give imitations of the songs they have recorded for phonograph records, but also reasonably recognizable imitations of Jimmy Durante, Groucho Marx and Charles Laughton. And so "Bagels and Yox" goes—or should I say go?

Palace Was Better.

The Holiday Theatre, which has had a number of changes of life since it began as the Gotham, is at 47th St. and Broadway. Right across from it is the Palace Theatre. There, at the Palace, is where the real bagels and yox were. There was Sophie Tucker, in person. There was Willie Howard. There was Lou Holtz, the best teller of anecdotes I ever heard. And there at the Palace were dozens of splendid entertainers who talked or sang Yiddish as easily as they did English, and we all laughed at their jokes or were moved by their songs even if we didn't know either language.

"Bagels and Yox" is not Palace Theatre quality. It means well and all its nice people work hard, but it hasn't the stuff to make it any better than semi-pro.